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UNCLAS BOGOTA 003703

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/AND, CA/VO/F/P, CA/FPP, CA/VO/L/C

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OTRA](#) [CMGT](#) [CVIS](#) [CA](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: COOPERATION WITH CANADIAN EMBASSY IN BOGOTA ON VISA PROCESSING

REF: 03 SECSTATE 344544

1. (U) Summary: Reftel recommended that posts share information with Canadian colleagues regarding visa processing, and offered a "template" for cooperation. The Consular Section in Bogota has long enjoyed a close relationship with the Canadian Embassy in Colombia. Using the ideas provided in reftel, post will work to deepen ties further. End summary.

2. (U) Reftel recommended that post schedule regular meetings with the Canadians and counterparts from other appropriate countries to discuss and analyze developments and trends, including fraud trends. In 2003, post organized a formal "Anti-Fraud Working Group," composed of representatives of 22 foreign embassies in Bogota. The Group meets monthly to share information regarding fraud trends, such as categories of applicants where fraud seems to be on the rise. It is a valuable forum for "talking shop," such as learning the factors European countries give the most weight to in interviews, or how Central American consular officials view applicants who have either received or been denied for a U.S. visa. When George Suhr, acting officer in charge of the DHS office in Panama, visited Bogota, post arranged for him to address the Group.

3. (U) Post supplements the formal activities of the Group with an informal monthly consular luncheon among a subset of the Group's members. These usually include representatives of Canada, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, Mexico and Japan. The luncheons provide a less structured opportunity to swap visa information.

4. (SBU) These multilateral efforts complement nearly daily contact between the Canadian Embassy and post's Fraud Prevention Unit ("FPU"). Post provides the Canadians with the names of persons removed from the United States or "turned around" at the border. We also occasionally perform namechecks on applicants to the Canadian refugee program. The Canadians send to the Deputy Fraud Chief the names of applicants for refugee whose applications are likely to be denied. These include a number of persons who identify themselves as members of terrorist organizations (i.e., the FARC, the ELN, or paramilitaries). Post then reviews those persons in its VISAS VIPER committee. Less dramatically, about 90 percent of the refugee applicants rejected by the Canadians have valid U.S. visas. Seeking refugee status brings into question the person's continuing ability to overcome INA Section 214(b). Consequently, post examines whether those person's visas should be revoked. In addition, U.S. and Canadian officials regularly consult one another by telephone to verify visas or stamps in the passports of applicants.

5. (U) Reftel suggested that posts "conduct reciprocal tours of visa operations for all newly assigned officers." Canadian consular officials (together with officials from the British Embassy) toured post's Consular Section on February 20, 2004. Officials from the Mexican Embassy toured the Section on February 27. Consular colleagues from other missions also visited the Section in 2003.

6. (U) Reftel also suggested that posts conduct appropriate joint training exercises and joint interdiction operations. Post will seek opportunities to implement these suggestions.

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